

Iraq

*Light at the
End of the Tunnel*

Congressman Marty Meehan
Member, House Armed Services Committee

January 2005

The Security Council:

Welcomes that the occupation will end and that Iraq will reassert its full sovereignty.

Reaffirms the right of the Iraqi people freely to determine their own political future and to exercise full authority and control over their financial and natural resources.

Endorses the proposed timetable for Iraq's political transition to democratic government including: Formation of the sovereign Interim Government of Iraq that will assume governing responsibility by 30 June 2004; Convening of a national conference reflecting the diversity of Iraqi society; and holding of direct democratic elections by 31 December 2004 if possible, and in no case later than 31 January 2005, to a Transitional National Assembly, which will, inter alia, have responsibility for forming a Transition Government of Iraq and drafting a permanent constitution for Iraq leading to a constitutionally elected government by 31 December 2005.

– UN Resolution 1546, June 8, 2004

The issue now is not more American troops or coalition troops for the long haul, but more Iraqi troops for the long haul... With the assumption of that greater burden, the burden on our troops should go down, and we should start to see our numbers going in the other direction.

– Secretary of State Colin Powell, January 8, 2005

January 2005

Introduction

The removal of Saddam Hussein's repressive and murderous Ba'athist regime was a major accomplishment by the United States military. The courage and skill with which the men and women of our Armed Forces performed this mission was remarkable. Nearly two years into the occupation, however, our forces face a growing, increasingly sophisticated insurgency. Significant parts of the country have plunged into violence and chaos, eroding the support of the local population for the U.S. mission and military. The worsening conditions threaten to undermine the goal of a stable and independent Iraq.

In response to deepening concern over the direction of U.S. involvement in Iraq, the Pentagon recently announced the appointment of a retired four-star general to provide a bottom-up review of the training of Iraqi security forces and the effectiveness of Coalition operations against the insurgency.¹ This is an overdue development. Through a combination of poor planning, miscalculation, and missed opportunities, the size, shape, and scope of the U.S. mission have fundamentally changed since the war began in March 2003.

As the January 30 election approaches, it is indeed an appropriate time to review U.S. policy in Iraq. The United States must take this opportunity to reexamine its goals in Iraq in the context of the global war on terrorism – and we must determine how to best achieve those goals in light of recent events that have limited the available policy choices. In addition, we must assess the long-term implications of the sustained occupation of Iraq on our military's readiness and personnel. Whether a prolonged occupation advances the cause of a free Iraq, let alone our overall strategic interests, is an open question that must be answered.

This white paper, the result of a congressional fact-finding mission to Iraq and extensive consultations with military and reconstruction experts, will assess the state of affairs in Iraq and place it in the context of America's global strategic objectives. Specifically, this paper will recommend an exit strategy that addresses our achievable goals in Iraq and propose the announcement of a timetable to withdraw the vast majority of U.S. forces within 12-18 months. This paper will single-out the training of Iraqi security forces as our top priority in Iraq and suggest that the long-term American role will not be in providing military occupation, but in leading the international reconstruction effort.

If we make the right choices, there is light at the end of the tunnel in Iraq.

¹ Eric Schmitt and Thom Shanker, "Rumsfeld Seeks Broad Review of Iraq Policy," *New York Times*, January 7, 2005. Larry DiRita, Department of Defense Spokesman, "Defense Department Briefing," January 7, 2005.

Elections and Insurgency

The elections by themselves are unlikely to quiet the insurgency.

Barring a last-minute change, the Iraqi people will vote on January 30, 2005 to elect a 275-member National Assembly tasked with drafting an Iraqi constitution and selecting the next Prime Minister. While the elections are only a first step, they represent an important milestone in post-Saddam Iraq. Free elections are a positive manifestation of our best intentions in Iraq. All Americans share in the hope that these elections proceed peacefully and with maximum participation.

If the elections occur on Jan. 30, current expectations are for Shiite candidates to win a majority of seats in the National Assembly. The leading ticket appears to be Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani's "United Iraqi Alliance," a 228-candidate, 22-party slate dominated by the two principal Shiite Islamist parties, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and the Da'wa Party.²

Unfortunately, there is little reason to believe that even successful elections will significantly improve security in Iraq. If Shiite victories are perceived by the Sunni population as displacing them from the institutions that will chart Iraq's future, the elections may have the effect of formalizing the political dynamic that helped spawn the insurgency in the first place.

A key concern surrounding the election is Sunni non-participation. The specter of non-participation stems from a combination of insurgent threats of attack, widespread cynicism about a favorable outcome, and a boycott by many Sunni leaders including the Iraq Muslim Clerics' Association.³ Both U.S. commanders and Prime Minister Iyad Allawi have acknowledged that four of Iraq's 18 provinces are not secure enough for citizens to vote.⁴ With two weeks before the elections, the least optimistic scenario is that widespread violence and a near complete lack of Sunni participation will either disrupt the elections or substantially undermine their legitimacy.

Even the most optimistic scenario – the elections proceed peacefully with some Sunni participation – would only modestly improve the underlying conditions in Iraq. The fundamental questions of Iraq's political future, including the system of government, the role of religion, the control of Iraq's resources, and the rights afforded Sunnis and other minorities, will remain unresolved. A disaffected, predominantly Sunni faction will likely reject the legitimacy of the elected National Assembly as it has rejected the Iraqi Interim Government.⁵ It is a self-reinforcing cycle: by not participating in the election, Iraqi Sunnis will be grossly underrepresented in the government which, in turn, will not represent their interests.

² "The Iran Factor in Iraq's Vote," *The New York Times*, January 5, 2005; Anton La Guardia, "Shia groups join forces to fight Iraq election" *The Daily Telegraph (London)*, December 10, 2004.

³ Karl Vick, "Sunni Party Pulls Out of Iraq Vote as Doubts Grow," *Washington Post*, December 28, 2004.

⁴ Dexter Filkins, "Some Iraq Areas Unsafe for Vote, U.S. General Says," *New York Times*, January 7, 2004.

⁵ Dana Priest and Robin Wright, "Scowcroft Skeptical Vote Will Stabilize Iraq; Friend of Bush Family Joins Pessimists," *Washington Post*, January 7, 2005. Scowcroft predicted an "incipient civil war" with the elections have "great potential for deepening the conflict."

A key reason to believe the insurgency will continue to rage regardless of how the election proceeds is the absence of any correlation in the past two years between the intensity of attacks and political milestones. For example, despite Administration rhetoric asserting that the insurgents were escalating attacks to disrupt the transfer of sovereignty, the reality was that June of 2004 – the month *leading up* to the transfer – saw the largest monthly decline in insurgent attacks. It has been since the handover that insurgent attacks have steadily increased, despite increasing counterinsurgency efforts including the elimination of “safe havens” in Fallujah, Ramadi, Samarra, and other strongholds.

The increased frequency and deadliness of attacks is more likely an indication that the insurgency is gaining in strength and lethal capacity rather than simply targeting the elections. Though President Bush has been guarded in his comments, both Secretary Rumsfeld and the military leadership have explicitly set expectations for continued violence after Jan. 30.⁶

Reassessing U.S. Strategic Objectives in Iraq

On September 12, 2002, President Bush addressed the United Nations General Assembly and presented Saddam Hussein’s regime with three principal ultimatums: “unconditionally forswear, disclose, and remove or destroy all weapons of mass destruction... immediately end all support for terrorism... and cease persecution of [the] civilian population.”⁷ Two turbulent years – and several transformations – later, the President’s speech to the United Nations may still guide us in re-evaluating the U.S. mission in Iraq.

The United States has risked its military strength and its moral standing to achieve success in Iraq. Failure is simply not an option. We know what has been accomplished. Three simple statements should define the mission yet to be accomplished:

- *Iraq must not threaten its neighbors or the United States or maintain a weapons of mass destruction program*
- *Iraq must not export terrorism or terrorize its own people*
- *Our actions in Iraq should advance the broader war on terrorism*

The remaining questions are questions of analysis and implementation: how do we achieve these goals given the current state of affairs in Iraq? Are our current actions bringing us closer to or farther away from our goals? Looking from fresh perspectives, what levers do we have at our disposal to help achieve these goals?

⁶ Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, “Department of Defense Operational Update,” December 22, 2004. “I think looking for a peaceful Iraq after the elections would be a mistake. I think our expectations level ought to be realistic about that... The extremists and the terrorists and the people who are determined to try to take back that country are determined not to lose.” See also General George W. Casey, Jr., Commander, Multi-National Force Iraq, “DoD News Briefing,” December 16, 2004. “When they have the elections on the 30th of January, the insurgency’s not going to go away... [Insurgencies] are protracted events. They go on for a long time.”

⁷ President George W. Bush, “Remarks at the United Nations General Assembly,” September 12, 2002.

Reassessing the U.S. Presence in Iraq

The United States military has performed with great skill and professionalism in Iraq. Our forces brilliantly executed the battle plan against Saddam Hussein's regime. They have borne an immense burden to advance security and reconstruction in the post-conflict phase. We are, however, at an inflection point in our involvement in Iraq. The United States needs a new strategy to stabilize the country and destroy the insurgency. Developing a new strategy begins by assessing the failures of our approach to date.

As the U.S. troop level has increased, the insurgency has strengthened.

By all measures, the insurgency has only gained in strength and deadliness in the past year. During that same time period the US troop presence has increased from its low of about 115,000 in February 2004 to 148,000 today.⁸

Fatal attacks on U.S. troops have increased from an average of 31 per month during the second half of 2003, to 52 per month during the first half of 2004, to 69 per month during the second half of 2004.⁹ The number of troops wounded in action has increased as well, from an average of 278 per month during the second half of 2003, to 497 per month during the first half of 2004, to 765 per month during the second half of 2004.¹⁰ Attacks on key infrastructure also increased over that period of time.¹¹

Pentagon estimates of the number of Iraqi insurgents have quadrupled from 5,000 a year ago to 20,000 today.¹² The deputy commander of Coalition forces, British Maj. Gen. Andrew Graham, has estimated that there are 40,000 to 50,000 active insurgent fighters.¹³ According to independent analysts, the insurgency also draws strength from part-time fighters and critical support (both active and passive) from civilians.¹⁴ Iraq's Intelligence Minister estimates there to be 40,000 "hard core" insurgents with a support network of 200,000 Iraqis.¹⁵ Most estimates put the core insurgency in the 20,000 to 40,000 person range with a support network in the 100,000 to 200,000 range.¹⁶

⁸ "Draft Working Papers: Iraq Status," *Department of Defense*, 17 February 2004. Eric Schmitt, "Insurgents in Iraq Using Roadside Bombs More Effectively," *New York Times*, December 16, 2004.

⁹ Monthly fatality figures from May 1, 2003 – March 31, 2004 at "Operation Iraqi Freedom Casualty Summary by Month", web1.whs.osd.mil/mmids/casualty/castop.htm. Fatality numbers from April 1 and onwards are reported as documented daily from "Operation Iraqi Freedom U.S. Casualty Status," *Department of Defense*.

¹⁰ Monthly wounded figures from May 1, 2003 – December 31, 2003 at "Operation Iraqi Freedom Casualty Summary by Month", web1.whs.osd.mil/mmids/casualty/castop.htm. Remaining months are documented daily from "Operation Iraqi Freedom U.S. Casualty Status," *Department of Defense*.

¹¹ The Brookings Institution, "Iraq Index," January 5, 2005.

¹² Eric Schmitt and David E. Sanger. "Guerillas Posing More Danger, Says U.S. Commander for Iraq," *New York Times*, November 14, 2003. Thom Shanker and Eric Schmitt, "Falluja Data Said to Pressure Guerillas," *New York Times*, December 3, 2004.

¹³ Johanna McGeary, "Mission Still Not Accomplished," *Time Magazine*, September 20, 2004.

¹⁴ Anthony Cordesman, "The Developing Iraqi Insurgency: Status at End-2004," Center for Strategic and International Studies, Working Draft, December 22, 2004.

¹⁵ "World this Week," *The Economist*, January 8, 2005.

¹⁶ Ned Parker, "Iraq Battling More Than 200,000 Insurgents: Intelligence Chief," *AFP*, January 3, 2005.

The Iraqi insurgency has grown and strengthened because large segments of the population have tired of decreasing security and prolonged occupation.

The insurgency appears to have at least three principle drivers: widespread opposition to foreign occupation, Sunni fears of an oppressive Shiite majority, and the desire of religious extremists to establish an Islamist state.

By all accounts, foreign jihadists comprise only a small percentage of the insurgents' ranks.¹⁷ On January 7, the Pentagon said that of the 8,500 prisoners the U.S. military is holding in Iraq, only 325 are foreign fighters – or less than 5%.¹⁸ Interrogations of detainees following the strike on Fallujah in November revealed that 95% of the fighters were Iraqi Sunnis. The organization led by the Jordanian terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi is estimated to include less than 1,000 men and “probably a core strength of no more than several hundred.” Nor is the insurgency primarily led by Saddam Hussein's top loyalists. Of the 55 Ba'ath Party leaders on the U.S.'s “most-wanted” list, only 8 remain at large.¹⁹

The insurgency is overwhelmingly indigenous to Iraq. It draws strength from nationalism and anti-Americanism among Iraqis – sentiments that have grown stronger since the onset of the occupation 20 months ago. Even many Iraqis who initially welcomed the American presence have become alienated by the prolonged occupation.²⁰ Polling data by our own State Department has tracked how the U.S. presence has steadily lost support and confidence among Iraqis.

To an increasing extent, Iraqis view the occupying forces as endangering rather than protecting their security. In November of 2003, according to a State Department poll, 11 percent said that they would feel “more safe” if coalition forces left immediately while 71 percent said they would feel “less safe.” But by April and May of 2004, a Coalition Provisional Authority poll found that 55 percent of Iraqis would feel more safe if the coalition forces left immediately.²¹

The November 2003 poll found that 66 percent of Iraqis agreed with the statement “the [insurgent] attacks emphasize the need for continued presence of Coalition forces.” But only 42 percent agreed with that sentiment in April-May of 2004. An IIACSS/State Department/CPA poll asked Iraqis how much confidence they had in Coalition forces to improve the situation in Iraq. From January to May 2004, the percent answering “a great deal” or “a fair amount” declined from 28.3% to 9.7%. The percent answering “not at all” increased from 53.3% to 80.6%.²² By the end of June 2004, according to the Iraq Center for Research and Strategic Studies, 67 percent of Iraqis “strongly or somewhat” opposed the presence of occupation forces.

¹⁷ Anthony Cordesman, “Fallujah and Its Aftermath Did Not Break the Insurgency's Back,” *The Daily Star*, Wednesday, November 24, 2004.

¹⁸ Douglas Jehl and Neil A. Lewis, “U.S. Said to Hold More Foreigners in Iraq Fighting,” *New York Times*, January 8, 2005.

¹⁹ Dexter Filkins and Sabrina Tavernise, “Claims About capture of Top Hussein Aide are Disputed,” *New York Times*, September 6, 2004.

²⁰ Anthony Cordesman, “Strengthening Iraqi Military and Security Forces,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, Working Draft, December 22, 2004.

²¹ Michael Hersh, “Grim Numbers,” *Newsweek*, June 15, 2004.

²² Anthony Cordesman, “Strengthening Iraqi Military and Security Forces,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, Working Draft, December 22, 2004.

80 percent asserted that coalition forces should leave Iraq “immediately or directly after the elections.”²³

In a CNN/*USA Today*/Gallup poll of 3,444 Iraqis conducted in March-April of 2004, 71 percent viewed Coalition forces as “occupiers” and only 19 percent as “liberators.” In a Coalition Provisional Authority poll taken in May 2004, fully 92 percent of Iraqis viewed Coalition forces as “occupiers” and only 2 percent as “liberators.”²⁴

These numbers suggest that while the insurgency has not won the support of most Iraqis, the occupation has lost it. By failing to provide security or the tangible benefits of democracy, the U.S. has exhausted the good will it earned by ending the Hussein regime. The Iraqi people still have a sense of optimism, but they do not believe their prospects are advanced by U.S. forces remaining in Iraq. Nearly all Iraqis want the United States to leave in the long-term, and many want us to leave immediately.

Iraqis are being presented with two conflicting messages. The first, promoted by many of their fellow countrymen, is that Americans have come to Iraq to fight Islam and steal oil. The other, promoted by the Americans, is that U.S. forces have selflessly come to help them succeed in their lives. The credibility gap we face in winning this battle of perceptions is at the root of our inability to counteract the insurgency.

The open-ended presence of U.S. forces has likely done more to inflame the insurgency than defeat it. Suspicion about our motives undermines the leaders who cooperate with us and endangers average Iraqis who are seen as participating in institutions that are linked to the occupation.

The declining support for Coalition forces among the Iraqi population is a critical weakness in what Gen. John Abizaid acknowledged has become a “classic guerilla war.”²⁵ As Andrew Krepinevich writes in his study of the Iraqi insurgency, “The center of gravity in counterinsurgency warfare is the target nation’s population, not the insurgent forces.”²⁶

The loss of support among the Iraqi civilian population has plunged the occupation into a vicious cycle where tactical victories do not advance strategic interests. Even insurgent attacks that kill Iraqi civilians seem to be blamed indirectly on the United States.²⁷ Each new additional casualty discredits the U.S. claim to be bringing security and stability to Iraq. According to former CIA official Michael Vickers, “Our large, direct presence has fueled the Iraqi insurgency as much as it has suppressed it.”²⁸

²³ Mark Turner, “80% of Iraqis Want Coalition Troops Out,” *USA Today*, July 7, 2004.

²⁴ Anne Penketh, “Middle East Turmoil: Blow for Bush as Poll Reveals Hostility to America and Support for Rebel Cleric,” *The Independent (London)*, June 17, 2004.

²⁵ “Military admits Iraq becoming ‘guerilla war,’” *The Seattle Times*, July 17, 2003.

²⁶ Andrew Krepinevich, “The War in Iraq: The Nature of Insurgency Warfare,” Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessment, June 2, 2004.

²⁷ William Langewiesche, “Letter from Baghdad,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, January/February 2005.

²⁸ Bryan Bender, “Hawks Push Deep Cuts in Forces In Iraq,” *The Boston Globe*, November 22, 2004.

Some military commanders seem to have anticipated this dynamic. The 1st Marine Division received the following guidance on counter-insurgency warfare in December 2003, before deploying to Iraq: “Both the insurgency and the military forces are competing for the same thing, the support of the people. The center of gravity of the insurgency is ... the support of the local population... If the military just targets the ‘insurgents’ instead of the ‘insurgency’ then it will fall into the ‘cycle of violence.’”²⁹

Unlike the U.S. missions in Bosnia and Kosovo, where announcing a determination to maintain a long-term presence enhanced U.S. credibility, in Iraq the open-endedness of the occupation only perpetuates suspicions and reinforces the rationale of the insurgency. According to Anthony Cordesman, “The lack of highly visible Iraqi forces, and the fact that US occupiers ... still dominate most security activity have also reinforced the image of a nation where fighting is done by foreigners, non-Muslims, and occupiers. The end result has been that many Coalition and Iraqi Interim Government tactical victories produce a costly political and military backlash. Even successful military engagements can lead to the creation of as many new insurgents as they do kill or capture.”³⁰

The U.S. government’s internal assessments are no better. This past summer, the Bush Administration’s National Intelligence Estimate for Iraq concluded that the outlook in Iraq is bleak, with possibilities ranging from civil war to, at best, tenuous stability.³¹

The United States lacks tactical intelligence, an area where the insurgents have an inherent advantage due to their familiarity with the population, culture, and terrain. Saddam fostered a culture of deception, which has increased the difficulty of discerning ally from enemy. A simple example: the suicide bomber who killed 18 Americans in a mess tent in Mosul last month was reportedly wearing an Iraqi military uniform.³²

The most alarming characteristic of the insurgency has been its ability to transform overnight. As in Vietnam, the enemy in recent months has quickly adapted tactics designed to inflict maximum damage on our forces while intimidating those who cooperate with us. While these tactics have provoked retaliation, the insurgents have foreclosed opportunities for U.S. forces to win conventional military victories on the open field of battle.³³ These tactics have proven effective against the current U.S. strategy.

²⁹ “Reconstructing Iraq,” International Crisis Group, September 2, 2004.

³⁰ Anthony Cordesman, “The Developing Iraqi Insurgency: Status at End-2004,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, December 22, 2004.

³¹ Douglas Jehl, “U.S. Intelligence Shows Pessimism on Iraq’s Future,” *New York Times*, September 16, 2004.

³² Maamoun Youssef, “Arab Newspaper: Suicide Bomber at U.S. Mess Hall in Mosul was Saudi Medical Student,” *Associated Press*, January 13, 2005.

³³ Lieutenant General Lance Smith, Deputy Commander of U.S. Central Command, “Special Defense Department Briefing on CENTCOM Operations,” December 15, 2004. “These guys are getting very, very good at concealing – or making it difficult for us to track them... They change their tactics, techniques and procedures very rapidly. And that’s the strength of an insurgency... When we started this insurgency, this was a force-on-force kind of stuff. They would come out, and they’d engage with us, and we’d kill a lot of them, and they’d go back and come back and fight another day. And that has been a totally unsuccessful method of operation for them... So they have had a growing understanding that where they can affect us is in the logistics flow... There are areas where we find it difficult to maintain constant guard – inside cities and the like... The enemy is very smart and thinking. It is a thinking enemy. So he changes his tactics, and he becomes more effective.”

The resilience of the insurgency has become even more apparent in the wake of recent assaults on insurgent “safe havens.” In early November of 2004, the Department of Defense concluded that a number of insurgent strongholds, the city of Fallujah in particular, were the most significant obstacles preventing Coalition forces from restoring peace throughout the country.³⁴ Pentagon officials were confident that a victory there would break the back of the insurgency and expected a resulting reduction in violence throughout Iraq. Fallujah was an operational success: the U.S. killed 1,200 insurgents, captured 2,000, and reclaimed territorial control over the city.³⁵ But while the Pentagon declared victory, the insurgency has not begun to diminish as a result of Fallujah; many believe that it has grown stronger elsewhere.³⁶ Most evidence suggests that many insurgents (and their weapons and supplies) were merely dispersed to other areas of Iraq.³⁷

Coalition forces have killed or captured insurgents at a rate of 1,000 – 3,000 per month for more than a year, and yet the insurgency shows no sign that its recruiting has declined.³⁸ The frequency of attacks has been maintained at up to 100 a day, from roadside bombings to ambushes to kidnappings.³⁹

There is little reason to believe that the insurgency’s strength will ebb anytime soon. Iraq’s population is 25 million, including about 5 million Sunni Arabs, with a median age for males of 19.1.⁴⁰ These demographics, combined with an estimated 30-40 percent unemployment rate, lend the Iraqi insurgency a sizable pool of potential recruits.⁴¹ In addition, insurgents have been able to draw upon a vast supply of weapons left over from the disintegration of Saddam’s Army, looted in the wake of the regime’s downfall, and smuggled into Iraq through its porous borders. According to the Pentagon, 250,000 tons of Iraqi munitions remain unsecured.⁴² Also left over from the former regime and unaccounted for are 4,000 shoulder-fired missiles.⁴³ Few

³⁴ Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, “Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld Press Briefing,” November 8, 2004. “Success in Fallujah will deal a blow to the terrorists in the country, and should move Iraq further away from a future of violence.” See also General George Casey, Commander, Multinational Force Iraq, “DoD Briefing - Iraq Security Forces and Multinational Forces Offensive Actions in Fallujah, Iraq,” November 8, 2004. “As you know, Fallujah has been the center of terrorist and insurgent activity in Iraq... Elimination of Fallujah as a terrorist safe haven will go a long way.” See also Lieutenant General Thomas Metz, Commander, Multinational Corps Iraq, “Special Defense Department Video Teleconference Briefing,” November 9, 2004. “I think because Fallujah has been the cancer, that when the cancer is removed it will impact other places.”

³⁵ Katarina Kratovac, “Security Checks to Greet Fallujah’s Returning Residents,” *Washington Post*, December 10, 2004.

³⁶ Karl Vick, “Trouble Spots Dot Iraqi Landscape; Attacks Erupting Away From Fallujah,” *Washington Post*, November 15, 2004. Anthony Shadid, “Iraqi Fighters Keep Up Attacks; Sunni Cleric Says Fallujah Attracted Hundreds of Recruits,” *Washington Post*, December 12, 2004.

³⁷ Lieutenant General Thomas F. Metz, Commanding General Multi-National Corps Iraq, “Operational Update,” January 5, 2005. “One of the measurements that I think shows the weakness is the insurgents’ inability to maintain safe havens. And I think we all know Fallujah was the major safe haven that they were able to maintain. That was taken from them... But you’re right; he continues to attack. And he is working for more and more spectacular attacks, which is the techniques of a terrorist, to intimidate and frighten the people. But he is weaker and cannot control neighborhoods and towns as he could a couple of months ago. So we believe that he is desperate.” See also General George W. Casey, Jr., Commander, Multi-National Force Iraq, “DoD News Briefing,” December 16, 2004. “With the liberation of Fallujah, they no longer have any safe havens anywhere in Iraq... What’s going on in Mosul, in my view, is not a safe haven. It’s an area where insurgents have gone and have had some success against the local security forces... It is certainly an area where they are operating and attempting to disrupt the election process and the coalition and Iraqi security force operations, but not a safe haven.”

³⁸ The Brookings Institution, “Iraq Index,” January 5.

³⁹ Rowan Scarborough, “Stifling Iraqi rebels a long-term project,” *Washington Times*, November 16, 2004.

⁴⁰ “Iraq,” *CIA World Fact Book*, 2004.

⁴¹ The Brookings Institution, “Iraq Index,” January 5.

⁴² William J. Broad and David E. Sanger, “Facts and Questions About Lost Munitions,” *The New York Times*, October 30, 2004.

⁴³ Dana Priest and Bradley Graham, “Missing Antiaircraft Missiles Alarm Aides,” *Washington Post*, November 7, 2004.

experts estimate that the insurgents face near term supply problems even as Coalition forces have seized large quantities of weapons and supplies.⁴⁴

Any opportunity the United States may have had to prevent a growing insurgency has slipped away irretrievably – the consequence of miscalculation, poor planning, and catastrophic decisions such as the disbanding of the Iraqi Army.

At this point, the options are limited. One U.S. official stated candidly that to restore security using conventional military tactics “we would have to do what we did in Fallujah all across Iraq – and we would need a U.S. soldier on every street corner.”⁴⁵

By serving as a focal point for tensions and violence in Iraq, the United States presence unifies the disparate elements of the insurgency and delays the political confrontations ultimately necessary to end the violence.

Despite assurances from the Bush Administration that the United States does not intend to maintain a permanent presence in Iraq, Iraqis have not been forced to seriously contemplate a post-occupation Iraq. The United States, in the words of one observer, has “persisted in futile combat against factions that should be confronting one another instead.”⁴⁶ Iraq is a divided country. But through its presence, the United States forestalls the durable political framework that is a prerequisite to lasting stability. With the constant, seemingly unending presence of the world’s most powerful military, Iraqis have less reason to assume responsibility for their own destiny. As a result, Iraq’s political development to date has not made progress toward the compromises needed to put Iraq’s sectarian differences into balance.

The United States is expending the lives of our soldiers and the wealth of our country to implement a government in which Shiites and Kurds will likely represent an overwhelming majority while the Sunni question remains unanswered.⁴⁷ Under a timetable for U.S. withdrawal, the majority factions would be required to engage Sunnis themselves and perhaps even forge compromises. A basic concern of Sunnis seems rational: Shiite leaders, including Sistani, fundamentally do not appear to accept that democracy entails minority rights or balances of power. In this sense, a U.S. exit strategy is as much about lifting disincentives for the Shiites to deal with the Sunnis.

Achieving U.S. Objectives with an Exit Strategy

The Bush Administration set a goal of establishing a liberal, free-market democracy in Iraq but even basic stability had eluded us. The United States is past the point of opportunity to defeat the insurgency with overwhelming military force. The violence continues to escalate in the short-term regardless of our actions. In the long-term, violence may decline with a reduction

⁴⁴ Anthony H. Cordesman, “The Developing Iraqi Insurgency: Status at End-2004,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, December 22, 2004.

⁴⁵ “Reconstructing Iraq,” International Crisis Group, September 2, 2004.

⁴⁶ Edward Luttwak, “Iraq: The Logic of Disengagement,” *Foreign Affairs*, January/February, 2005.

⁴⁷ David Ignatius, “How Iran is Winning Iraq,” *Washington Post*, December 17, 2004. Talal Gaaod, Sunni tribal leader from Ramadi: “My people feel that Iraq is going into a deep hole. Things are not improving but getting worse. I blame the United States for giving the [Shiite] clergy a front to lead events in Iraq. I am sure you will regret this one day.”

in the U.S. presence. At this point in time, the risks of a phased withdrawal are lower than the risks associated with an indefinite occupation. If we hope to change perceptions at the local level, encourage international cooperation, and stop the insurgency, the United States must fundamentally recast its role in Iraq.

To no avail, the Administration has expressed hopes that major milestones would change the underlying dynamic in Iraq – the capture of Saddam, the deaths of his sons, the transition to sovereignty, the strikes against insurgent “safe havens,” and now the upcoming January 30 elections. Ultimately, the situation in Iraq will improve only through a combination of security achieved by Iraqi forces and a political solution brokered by Iraqis.

Immediate withdrawal is simply not an option. Iraq’s fledgling government is not strong enough at this point to stand on its own. If the government were to collapse, civil war would likely ensue. What the United States must do, however, is create incentives for the violent factions within Iraq to engage each other peacefully.

In the coming months, the United States should announce a timetable for withdrawing the vast majority of its forces from Iraq by mid-2006. In addition, the United States must clarify with absolute certainty our intention not to maintain a permanent military presence in Iraq.

The announcement of a timetable for a U.S. withdrawal will transform the situation in Iraq. The politics and reality on the ground for every party in Iraq will change. Moreover, as we prepare to spell out the terms of our withdrawal, we gain leverage with all who might gain or lose ground based on those terms. There are limits to this leverage: for example, the United States cannot credibly threaten to “cut and run” immediately. Nor can we promise all things to all people. We can, however, make arrangements that increase the likelihood that various factions will agree to participate in a peaceful political process in Iraq.

Announcing a timetable for drawing down troop strength would:

- *Help win the support of the Iraqi people for the political process and against the insurgency*

Setting a timetable for withdrawal would clarify that the United States has no long-term desire to occupy Iraq or control its resources. This would strengthen the legitimacy of the Iraqi government produced by the January 30 elections. It would also help begin to reduce the Iraqi population’s distrust of Coalition forces.

There are two basic counterinsurgency tactics: assault and pacification. The United States has chosen the assault route – to seek out insurgents, join them in battle, and win. This was the primary approach in Fallujah. The second approach, pacification, changes the emphasis to winning the support of the population and thereby slowing the growth and decreasing the support of the insurgency.

Secretary Rumsfeld's announcement of a review of Iraq policy is a step in the right direction. Realizing that the tactical victory in Fallujah did not have the intended impact, the Bush Administration appears to have shifted the emphasis from defeating the insurgency in conventional battle to "Iraqifying" security forces and putting a new emphasis on training.

- *Weaken or splinter the insurgency*

Reducing the U.S. presence, or even announcing intentions to do so, may help deprive the insurgency of its support among the population. The indefinite length of the U.S. occupation has served to unite violent factions within Iraq. Without a nationalist, anti-American banner, the loosely allied insurgent factions would likely begin to splinter over their own substantial internal differences. One expert writes that "the only factor that unites Muslim fundamentalist mujahideen, secular Baathist holdouts, and Shiite extremists is their desire to expel American forces....If that rallying cause can be weakened by diminishing Washington's involvement, the Iraqi government should be able to play on divisions among the rebels, steering some of them away from violence and toward the political mainstream, while marginalizing and dividing the rest."⁴⁸ Another expert argues that "because Iraq is under foreign occupation, Islamic, nationalist, and pan-Arab sentiments currently prevail over denominational identities, inducing Sunni and Shiite Arabs to unite against their invaders."⁴⁹ As the U.S. presence recedes, its unintended tendency to mobilize and unify the insurgency diminishes.

- *Encourage the government to resolve the political issues that prolong the insurgency*

Our inability to convince the Shiites to integrate the Sunnis into the government has been the fundamental political failure of post-Saddam Iraq. A move toward withdrawal may be the best way to change that outcome. Our principal negotiating partners ought to be the majority Shiites and the Kurds, not the Sunni insurgents; it is the Shiites and the Kurds who have the political leverage within Iraq. Ultimately, it must be the Shiites and Kurds – not the United States – who strike the power-sharing compromises needed to end the armed rebellion.

- *Enhance the U.S.'s legitimacy abroad*

By announcing a timetable for the drawdown of U.S. forces, we begin to reverse the widespread perception that the invasion of Iraq was motivated by imperial designs. While it is unlikely that new nations would send significant numbers of troops at this late date, newfound legitimacy could give foreign leaders the political leeway to send units to perform specialized functions such as training Iraqi security forces. At the very least, it would provide a fresh opportunity to engage the international community in diplomacy and reconstruction going forward. Beginning the process of healing divisions over Iraq would enable enhanced cooperation in other aspects of the war on terror.

⁴⁸ James Dobbins, "Iraq: Winning the Unwinnable War," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February, 2005.

⁴⁹ Edward Luttwak, "Iraq: The Logic of Disengagement," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2005.

- *Prompt Iraq's neighbors to cooperate*

A timetable for disengagement may force Iraq's neighbors into cooperating with Iraq's political development rather than sabotaging it. Iraq's neighbors have more to fear from anarchy in Iraq than the United States. "Anarchy in Iraq would threaten not merely Iran's stability," writes Edward Luttwak, "but also its territorial integrity."⁵⁰ Yet with the United States expending lives and treasure to stabilize Iraq, Iran is free to support violent elements within Iraq without the fear that a resulting chaos will spread. Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey would also be threatened by anarchy and might be persuaded to step up intelligence sharing or reconstruction aid. As for Syria, the United States must wield the threat of punitive sanctions if it continues to provide financial and logistical support to violent factions.⁵¹

- *Find "light at the end of the tunnel" for U.S. forces and taxpayers:*

The occupation in Iraq has overstretched the military and financially burdened American taxpayers to a far greater extent than Administration officials predicted.

In March 2003, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz asserted that Iraq "can really finance its own reconstruction and relatively soon." Two years later, the United States has spent a total of \$152 billion on military operations in Iraq and continues to spend about \$4.8 billion each week.⁵² Congress is awaiting a request from the Bush Administration for \$80-100 billion in new supplemental funds.⁵³

As late as May of 2003, the Bush Administration was announcing plans to reduce the U.S. presence to 30,000 troops or fewer by the Fall of that year.⁵⁴ But with five times that number remaining in Iraq nearly two years later, the military has been stretched dangerously thin.

All of the Army's active-duty combat brigades were deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan in 2003 or 2004 – and all will have to go back again. The strain has been particularly severe on the Reserve Component which comprises 42-43% of our forces in Iraq.⁵⁵ On December 20, the Army Reserve Chief General Lieutenant General James R. Helmly wrote an alarming letter to the Army Chief of Staff asserting that the Army Reserve is "rapidly degenerating into a 'broken' force" unable to "...regenerate its forces for follow-on and future missions."⁵⁶ Lieutenant General Helmly estimated that only 37,000 of the 207,000 reserve soldiers are currently deployable.

⁵⁰ Edward Luttwak, "Iraq: The Logic of Disengagement," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2005.

⁵¹ Douglas Jehl, "U.S. Weighs New Syria Sanctions," *New York Times*, January 6, 2005.

⁵² Tony Capaccio, "Iraq War Cost \$102 Billion Through September, Pentagon Says," *Bloomberg.com*, January 13, 2005.

⁵³ Bryan Bender, "War Funding Request May Hit \$100 Billion," *Boston Globe*, December 15, 2004.

⁵⁴ Michael R. Gordon and Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Plans to Reduce Forces in Iraq, with Help of Allies," *New York Times*, May 3, 2003.

⁵⁵ GlobalSecurity.org, "Iraq Forces Order of Battle – early December 2004."

⁵⁶ Lieutenant General James Helmly, Chief, U.S. Army Reserve, "Readiness of the United States Army Reserve," Memorandum to the Army Chief of Staff, December 20, 2004.

The extended deployments and the Administration's use of "stop-loss" policies to prevent personnel from leaving the services risk a recruiting and retention crisis. The Army Reserve fell 10% short of its recent recruiting goals, while the National Guard fell 30% short.⁵⁷ When the Pentagon activated more than 4,000 members of the Individual Ready Reserve 1,800 resisted and one-third of those due to report for training did not show up on time.⁵⁸ Servicemembers and their families are bearing intense personal burdens as a result of the war, including marital strains, financial troubles, and psychiatric disorders as a result of combat.⁵⁹

Announcing a timetable for withdrawal will protect taxpayers, relieve strains on the military, forestall a recruiting and retention crisis, and give soldiers and their families a clearer sense of when they will be reunited.

A Realistic Exit Strategy

While an immediate withdrawal would risk chaos, a permanent presence guarantees disaster. Keeping U.S. troops in Iraq for an extended duration will only provoke fiercer and more widespread resistance. That being said, withdrawing them prematurely could spark a civil war. The appropriate decision to balance Iraq's short-term security training needs with its long-term political imperatives is a phased withdrawal of U.S. forces.

If the United States committed to withdrawing the majority of its forces by mid-2006, a smaller, lighter force of no more than 30,000 to 50,000 could remain. The remaining U.S. forces would focus on a specific set of responsibilities while Iraqi forces transition into primary responsibility for internal security:

- *Expedite the training of high-end Iraqi security forces*
- *Prevent cross-border smuggling of weapons and supplies to the insurgency*
- *Lock down remaining conventional weapons sites*
- *Prevent factions within Iraq from overrunning each other, such as a possible ethnic conflict over historically disputed territories*
- *Engage in quick strikes against insurgent or terrorist infrastructure that put a premium on minimizing the risk of civilian casualties*

⁵⁷ Frank James, "With casualties rising, military has tough time finding new enlistees," *Chicago Tribune*, January 4, 2005.

⁵⁸ Monica Davey, "Former U.S. soldiers balk at new orders to return," *New York Times*, November 17, 2005.

⁵⁹ 17% of servicemembers involved in major combat in Iraq suffered from major depression, generalized anxiety, or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): Charles W. Hoge, M.D., Carl A. Castro, Ph.D., Stephen C. Messer, Ph.D., Dennis McGurk, Ph.D., Dave I. Cotting, Ph.D., and Robert L. Koffman, M.D., M.P.H., "Combat Duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, Mental Health Problems, and Barriers to Care," *New England Journal of Medicine*, Volume 351, pgs 13-22, July 1, 2004. The Army, alarmed by divorce rates as high as 21 percent among couples where one spouse has been sent to war, is spending \$2 million on a variety of marriage programs: Kimberly Hefling, "Army Seeks to Save War-Torn Marriages," *Associated Press*, December 29, 2004.

The U.S. military should develop a realistic plan to put in place the following factors to enable a successful withdrawal of most U.S. forces by mid-2006:

- *Ensure force protection*

Announcing a timetable to disengage from Iraq while reducing the American presence in urban areas should lessen the risks faced by U.S. troops. Any withdrawal plan must also ensure that the departing soldiers are protected from insurgent attacks and that any attempt to strike at units leaving or preparing to leave for Iraq will be met with retribution.

- *Minimize the visibility of the U.S. military presence*

U.S. forces in Iraq must carry a lower profile, while maintaining the ability to strike quickly against insurgents. To as great an extent as possible, U.S. troops should not patrol Iraqi neighborhoods or engage in frequent military assaults on insurgent forces within residential areas.

- *Guard likely flashpoints of civil war*

A potential pitfall of overly hasty withdrawal is the risk of resulting anarchy in Iraq. Several analysts have written that the most likely flashpoint of civil conflict is the oil-rich region surrounding Kirkuk. The U.S. must make clear that it will not tolerate a Kurdish advance on Kirkuk and position its remaining forces to prevent against this and other potential flashpoints of civil war.

- *Secure Iraq's borders and weapons sites*

The disastrous failure of the Bush Administration to plan for post-war Iraq gave insurgents a bonanza of weapons and munitions from Saddam's stockpiles. The insurgents have also gained material support from Iraq's neighboring countries, especially Syria, according to Administration officials. Any plan to withdraw forces from Iraq must prevent the insurgents from accessing additional supplies of weapons.

Iraqi Security Forces in an Exit Strategy

Expediting the training of and responsibility given to Iraqi security forces must be the number one priority of the United States government in Iraq.

With U.S. forces meeting essentially the entire burden for security, the training and performance of the Iraqi security forces to date has, by all accounts, been poor to moderate at best.⁶⁰ The failure to plan for post-war Iraq resulted in many Iraqi forces lacking adequate organization, training, equipment, or facilities. The largest mistake was the initial decision to

⁶⁰ Richard Oppel and James Glanz, "U.S. Officials Say Iraq's Forces Founder Under Rebel Assaults," *New York Times*, November 30, 2004.

disband the Iraqi Army rather than “de-Ba’athify” its top ranks and leave in place unit cohesion. As the insurgency developed, the United States “did not attempt to seriously train and equip Iraqi forces for proactive security and counterinsurgency missions until April 2004 – nearly a year after the Fall of Saddam,” writes Cordesman.⁶¹

The Pentagon has said that the Iraqi Army is 10% toward its goal of 27,000, the Police has about 35% of the 135,000 required, and the National Guard has about 70% of the 62,000 required.⁶² According to a recent State Department report, “insurgent activity has tested Iraqi security forces and their efforts to develop and perform In some areas, such as the provinces of Al Anbar and Ninawa, some Iraqi security forces have been rendered ineffective. Due to insurgent intimidation and terrorist activity, large numbers of Police Service, Iraqi Highway Patrol, and the Department of Border Enforcement personnel in the Al Anbar Province have quit or abandoned their stations, along with police in several other cities.”⁶³ President Bush called the training of security forces “mixed.”⁶⁴

Despite these failures, there remains widespread consensus that the status of Iraqi security forces is the key factor in Iraq’s ability to govern itself. Unfortunately, the occupation itself has had some adverse effects on the security training program. Visible cooperation with U.S. forces has made the Iraqi security forces targets for insurgents. Scores of security forces and trainees have been killed in car bombings, drive-by shootings, kidnappings, and executions. Consequently, untold numbers of potential recruits have been deterred from joining.

In addition, the presence of U.S. forces reduces the Iraqi security forces’ willingness to risk their lives to fight insurgents. With better-trained and better-equipped U.S. forces fighting alongside them, Iraqi forces are presumably less likely to join the fight. According to the International Crisis Group, the security forces suffer from “ambivalence toward the occupation forces and the political transition as well as the absence of credible military and political institutions to which their loyalty can be directed.”⁶⁵ Announcing a timetable for a U.S. withdrawal may give Iraqi security forces renewed allegiance to the fledgling Iraqi government and greater reason to assume responsibilities for defending it. In the words of President Bush, “ultimately the success in Iraq is going to be the willingness of the Iraqi citizens to fight for their own freedom.”

The United States should expedite the training of security forces by devoting additional resources and seeking greater commitments of trainers from other nations, including NATO and neighboring Muslim countries. Priority should be given to training the forces to meet Iraq’s most pressing needs, namely a police force that includes a counterterrorist “special unit.”

⁶¹ Anthony Cordesman, “Strengthening Iraqi Military and Security Forces,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, December 22, 2004.

⁶² Brian Bender, “Report Paints Bleak Picture of Iraqi Forces, US Officials See Urgent Need For Better Training,” *The Boston Globe*, January 8, 2005. Lieutenant General Thomas Metz, Commander U.S. Ground Forces Iraq: “There’s areas where the Iraqi security forces have performed well,” Metz said. “There’s areas where they’ve performed sub-optimally. There’s areas where they’ve been overwhelmed by their opposition and have had to step back and live to fight another day. And there’s areas where they’ve just plain not participated in the fight.”

⁶³ “Section 2207 Report on Iraq Relief and Reconstruction,” U.S. Department of State, January 5, 2004.

⁶⁴ President George W. Bush, “President Holds Press Conference,” December 20, 2004.

⁶⁵ “Reconstructing Iraq,” International Crisis Group, September 2, 2004.

The training of Iraqi security forces has been given a misplaced emphasis. Of particular importance is to emphasize quality over quantity of troops, with a focus on leadership and effective units.⁶⁶ The United States should place its emphasis on training the high-end counterterrorist branch of the police rather than meeting overall numerical goals. This includes rapid-response anti-terrorism units, police battalions with light infantry equipment, and SWAT teams. One promising proposal is to change the training paradigm to include closer involvement by an American training brigade, preferably an Army Ranger training battalion, as well as federal law enforcement trainers.⁶⁷ High-quality Iraqi forces will provide better tactical intelligence and less hostile interface with Iraqi civilians.

Over the next 12-18 months, if the Administration places its priority on training at least 25,000 high-end security forces, it will allow the majority of U.S. troops to leave Iraq without worsening Iraq's security. Americans should be confident that the insurgency in Iraq can be defeated, but only by Iraqi forces under Iraqi leadership.

The Road to Reconstruction

The United States must remain invested in Iraq's reconstruction, with priority given to aid projects with an immediate impact on employment.

Disengaging from Iraq would be a mistake if the central challenge were reconstruction, not security, or if the trends were moving in a positive direction. If the United States could resolve the conflict through time, money, or even sheer military might, this white paper would be urging that course of action. Unfortunately, the challenge we are facing is entirely different from that of post-war Germany and Japan, where "local populations were already thoroughly disenthralled from violent ideologies, and so they eagerly collaborated with their occupiers to construct democratic institutions."⁶⁸

Despite these differences, reconstruction will remain an integral component of American involvement. Beyond stability, the final measure of success in Iraq will be its emergence as a functioning, responsible state in the region. The World Bank estimates that in the next three years we will need to expend, at a minimum, \$36 billion to reconstruct Iraqi infrastructure and rebuild war-ravaged cities like Najaf and Fallujah. This does not include another \$20 billion the Coalition Provisional Authority calculated for security and the oil sector.⁶⁹

The reconstruction efforts thus far have been halting at best. Of the \$21 billion appropriated for reconstruction, only \$4.3 billion (21%) has been spent.⁷⁰ A large percentage of these funds, 50-70 percent by some estimates, have gone to provide security for projects and foreign contractors.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Anthony Cordesman, "Strengthening Iraqi Military and Security Forces," Center for Strategic and International Studies, December 22, 2004.

⁶⁷ Peter Khalil, "In Iraq, Less Can Be More," *New York Times*, December 20, 2004.

⁶⁸ Edward Luttwak, "Iraq: The Logic of Disengagement," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2005.

⁶⁹ "United Nations/World Bank Joint Iraq Needs Assessment," The World Bank and UN Development Group, October, 2003.

⁷⁰ "State Department Weekly Briefing," U.S. Department of State, January 12, 2005.

⁷¹ "Estimated Breakdown of Funding Flows for Iraq's Reconstruction: How are the Funds Being Spent," Center for Strategic and International Studies, December 2004.

A recent assessment by the Center for Strategic and International Studies evaluated progress in Iraq in five key areas: Security, Governance and Participation, Economic Opportunity, Basic Services, and Social Services (including education and health care). According to the study, Iraq has not moved in a sustained positive direction in any of these five areas. Security has clearly gotten worse and is impeding progress in every other facet of Iraqi life. For example, more schools have been built, but many parents are too afraid to send their children to school. More hospitals have been built, but roadblocks, violence, and banditry have blocked people and medical supplies from getting to hospitals.⁷²

But the lack of security is not the only factor impeding reconstruction. The most disappointing aspect of reconstruction was the Bush Administration's lack of a strategy to prevent extreme levels of unemployment in the early days after the war. The Coalition Provisional Authority set ambitious goals for full-employment in Iraq by the end of 2004 yet provided no active strategy to get Iraqis off the street and into work. Today, unemployment remains at 30-40%. In some areas unemployment is twice that high.⁷³ A comprehensive jobs program must be a key component of any strategy for the future of Iraq.⁷⁴

One model for success is Gen. Petraeus's efforts last year in Mosul. As commander of the Army's 101st Airborne Division, Gen. Petraeus bypassed the Coalition Provisional Authority's bureaucracy by spending \$36 million confiscated from Saddam's palaces on projects that would create jobs immediately: "the reconstruction of Mosul University, irrigation schemes, and an oil-for-electricity deal with Turkey that brought Mosul round-the-clock power while Baghdad was still suffering from blackouts." Despite the CPA's decision to disband the Army, Gen. Petraeus arranged a monthly stipend for 25,000 ex-soldiers.⁷⁵

A U.S. military drawdown in Iraq will generate billions of dollars in savings – savings that can be used to directly aid Iraqis in the most effective way: by putting people back to work, decreasing street crime, rebuilding infrastructure and public works, and laying the foundation for a refurbished education and health care system.

⁷² Frederick Barton and Bathsheba Crocker, "Progress or Peril: Measuring Iraq's Reconstruction," Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 2004.

⁷³ The Brookings Institution, "Iraq Index," January 5.

⁷⁴ "Reconstructing Iraq," International Crisis Group, September 2, 2004. "Progress or Peril: Measuring Iraq's Reconstruction," Center for Strategic and International Studies, September, 2004.

⁷⁵ Joshua Hammer, "Tikrit Dispatch: Uncivil Military," *The New Republic*, March 1, 2004.

Conclusion: Iraq and the Global War on Terror

The United States serves its own interests by honoring the Iraqi people's desire for peace and independence. By carefully drawing down troop levels, the United States demonstrates our commitment to popular sovereignty and democracy in the Muslim world.

The current U.S. policy in Iraq is hurting the global war on terror. The war continues to expend finite resources, erode military readiness, strain long-standing alliances, and inflame the Muslim world.

It does not have to be this way. By announcing a schedule for withdrawal, the U.S. sends a message to Iraqis and all citizens of the world that we believe Iraq is capable of making decisions about its future and controlling its resources. We declare our disinterest in using Iraq as a permanent platform for regional dominance.

There is great promise for what President Bush has called a “forward strategy of freedom” if the United States commits to full diplomatic engagement in the Middle East.⁷⁶ As part of its effort to draw down forces in Iraq, the U.S. must remain engaged diplomatically in the region – particularly in demonstrating its sincerity in working towards a resolution in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Through savvy diplomacy, the reconstruction of Iraq is an opportunity for major advances in American relations with the rest of the Middle East. One immediate opportunity is in regional diplomatic contact with Iraq’s neighbors, similar to the Bosnian Peace Implementation Council.

For long-term success, the United States must redefine its goals in Iraq in terms that are meaningful not just to Iraqis but to Muslims in general. American rhetoric about the war on terrorism and democratization are meaningless to these audiences unless evidenced by stability and meaningful sovereignty in Iraq. The questions of Iraq’s future must be answered by Iraqis, with the support of the international community and reduced reliance on the United States.

Prolonged military occupation will not end the insurgency nor will it secure U.S. interests. It will only bring more casualties. The United States must not, however, pull out suddenly and allow terrorists to seek haven amid the ensuing chaos. The United States must, instead, maintain a role in moving Iraq towards self-governance while at the same time making clear its plans to leave Iraq over the next 12-18 months. The United States military occupation must be transformed into an Iraqi peacekeeping mission. That means announcing plans to bring the vast majority of our troops home as part of a more comprehensive plan to complete the training Iraqi security forces and invest in the economic reconstruction in Iraq.

The United States can credibly declare victory for removing Saddam Hussein and transitioning Iraq to formal sovereignty. As the Iraqi people take the next step towards assuming real ownership of their country, they want an end to the military occupation that controls their streets and many aspects of their daily lives. The United States serves its own best interests by honoring those expressions of independence and free will.

⁷⁶ President George Bush, “Remarks on the 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy,” November 6, 2003.